

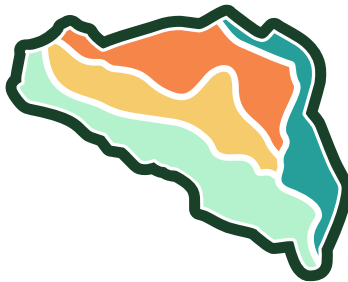
SOUTHERN RIVERS ROUNDTABLE

Coming Together to Protect &
Enjoy Our Local Watersheds

2025-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

OUR MISSION:

The Southern Rivers Roundtable aims to convene regional agencies and stakeholders to facilitate dialogue and collaboration on initiatives pertaining to the well-being of the Chowan Basin and Albemarle-Pamlico Watershed's ecosystems and communities.



OUR VISION:

We envision a resilient regional coalition of partners across the Chowan Basin and Albemarle-Pamlico Watershed that centers on natural resources and the communities that rely upon them in its work to improve visibility, resources, public access, and project implementation.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The Chowan Basin is comprised of the Blackwater, Nottoway, and Meherrin Rivers, which converge to form the Chowan River as it meanders to the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina. Roughly 70% of the water flows from headwaters in south-central Virginia as far north as Petersburg. The region's geological history reflects cycles of marine transgressions and regressions, meaning the sea level rose and fell repeatedly, depositing layers of sand, silt, and clay. These processes shaped the basin's current landscape of blackwater rivers, floodplain forests, and wetlands.

The history of the region is intrinsically entwined with indigenous communities, with evidence of Pre-Clovis occupation dating back 20,000 years. By the time of the first European contact, the Cheroenhaka/Nottoway, Chowanoke, Weyanoke,, Meherrin, Tuscarora, Occaneechee, Sappony, Saponi, and Nansemond tribes occupied Virginia's southern tier. These tribes acted as stewards of these lands pre-contact, and their descendants continue to do so today.

Comprising 25% of Virginia's land, including 38 counties and independent cities, spanning from the Atlantic Ocean to the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Albemarle-Pamlico Watershed is the second largest estuarine system in the country, behind the Chesapeake Bay. The watershed provides critical resources to the communities living within its boundaries, including drinking water for 2 million Virginians, boating and fishing opportunities, pristine wetland habitats, and some of the last intact long leaf pine ecosystems.

In 2020, Virginia and North Carolina renewed a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) for the Support of Cooperative Conservation and Management of the Albemarle-Pamlico Region. The Southern Rivers Roundtable was created to fill a void in regional collaboration, funding, and visibility for the Chowan Basin and Albemarle-Pamlico Watershed.

The Roundtable will address the four key focal areas of flood resilience, outdoor recreation, land conservation, and water quality through avenues of policy and planning, project development and implementation, and technical assistance to fulfill the requirements of the MOU in alignment with the goals of the [Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership](#).

This strategic plan provides a foundation and touchstone for the Southern Rivers Roundtable to guide the organization in the pursuit of its mission and vision over the next three years. Having a clear roadmap to success will allow the Roundtable to increase its impact and build new partnerships along the way.

MEETINGS & COMMITTEES

The Southern Rivers Roundtable convenes quarterly meetings of the full membership and interim quarterly meetings of four committees to pursue goals specific to each of the Roundtable’s focal areas:

- *Flood Resilience*
- *Land Conservation*
- *Outdoor Recreation*
- *Water Quality*

Throughout 2024 and 2025, the committees and full Roundtable convened twice each to develop and refine the goals and objectives to guide the Roundtable’s activities for the next three years.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. Flood Resilience

Flood resilience in the Chowan Basin region of Virginia is a growing priority due to increasing flood risks from heavy rainfall and changing climate patterns. According to Virginia’s Coastal Resilience Master Plan, the Chowan Basin is identified as a vulnerable inland watershed where flood impacts are driven more by precipitation than tidal surge. Virginia’s resilience approach emphasizes the need for nature-based solutions, improved stormwater infrastructure, and community engagement to reduce flood risks in such regions. The Southern Rivers Roundtable plan aims to support localities in the Chowan Basin by compiling data, accessing funding pathways, and providing technical assistance to enhance long-term resilience.

- **Goal 1.1:** Support localities in the Chowan Basin with floodplain administration and management through policy, ordinance, etc.
 - Compile/crosswalk DCR’s existing inventory of floodplain model ordinances and approved resilience plans
 - *Partners & Resources:* Crater PDC Regional Resilience Plan, [DCR Coastal Resilience Master Plan](#), [DCR Flood Protection Master Plan](#)
 - Review successful models from neighboring North Carolina communities and applicability to VA communities
 - Collaborate with Resilient A-P to promote interstate partnerships for flood resilience
 - *Partners & Resources:* Floodplain Blueprint, Decision-Making Tool for Localities
 - Provide training and support to localities who need additional floodplain administration capacity; encourage participation in the [Community Rating System \(CRS\)](#)
 - *Partners & Resources:* CRS Workgroup/Wetlands Watch

- **Goal 1.2:** Support project identification/development, application, and administration of [Community Flood Preparedness \(CFPF\)](#) and other flood resilience grants to pursue project implementation
 - Review regional resilience plans, hazard mitigation plans (HMPs), intended use plans, comprehensive plans/land use plans and other relevant planning materials for existing and planned resilience projects
 - *Partners & Resources:* NC State Revolving Fund & VRLF Intended Use Plan, County Comprehensive Plan/Future Land Use Plan
 - Provide funding for small-scale projects where possible
- **Goal 1.3:** Promoting nature-based solutions
 - Provide training and support to locality stormwater, public works, and grounds staff on installation, evaluation, and maintenance of nature-based best management practices (BMPs) ([Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional](#))
- **Goal 1.4:** Increase public awareness and visibility of flood risk and types of flooding in the Chowan Basin (ie. flash flooding, erosion, etc.)
 - Collaborate with local officials to create materials for public outreach and education
 - Attend and participate in local events to provide education and outreach where citizens are most likely to be

2. Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation in the Chowan Basin region of Virginia offers a wealth of opportunities thanks to its diverse landscapes, including hardwood bottomland swamps and upland riparian forests. The area supports activities such as paddling, fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing, which contribute to local quality of life, tourism, and economic development. The Southern Rivers Roundtable aims to expand trail networks, improve water access points, and conserve natural areas to enhance recreational experiences while protecting the region's ecological integrity. These initiatives also aim to ensure that outdoor spaces are accessible and welcoming to all residents and visitors.

- **Goal 2.1:** Model ordinance toolkit for ecotourism/agritourism by-right zoning/land use (Sussex, Isle of Wight, Albemarle)
 - *Partners & Resources:* Dinwiddie Agritourism Ordinance
- **Goal 2.2:** Pursuit of state and/or federal scenic river designation for Nottoway, Blackwater, Meherrin

- **Goal 2.3:** Outdoor Recreation/Agritourism/Ecotourism Market, Feasibility, and Branding Study
 - DCR Data mapping & prioritization of lands for promotion, protection, etc.
 - Understand and mitigate challenges existing and future operators face in the region
 - Create cohesive branding and messaging to enhance visibility and build regional recognition as an outdoor recreation destination
 - *Partners & Resources:* [Crater PDC 2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Southeast Crescent Regional Commission](#)

- **Goal 2.4:** Support existing and new outdoor recreation facilities, operators, and efforts to expand public access
 - Explore establishing nonprofit “Friends of—” organization(s) to increase visibility, spearhead advocacy efforts, and procure donations
 - Identify and partner with existing recreation-based orgs to build presence and business models that can be replicated
 - *Partners & Resources:* American Rivers, American Whitewater, Ducks Unlimited, Local Chambers of Commerce, Union Sportsmen’s Alliance , Nottoway Hunt Club, Department of Wildlife Resources, Department of Conservation & Rec, America’s Great Waters
 - Identify what types of assets we should target (public/private partnership)
 - Business startup/permitting assistance
 - Support [Airfield 4H Center’s](#) Environmental Education programs during summer and offseason periods; site beautification and signage, trail maintenance/surfacing, etc.

- **Goal 2.5:** Develop Blueway/Greenway Plan for entire Nottoway, Blackwater, and Meherrin
 - *Partners & Resources:* [VDOT Public Access MOU with DCR & DWR, DCR Recreational Trails Program, Land and Water Conservation Fund \(LWCF\)](#)

- **Goal 2.6:** Identify and secure funding to remove/remediate derelict dams and other structures that obstruct waterways and create hazards for paddlers, anglers, and swimmers, as well as impede fish passage and contribute to flooding and sedimentation
 - *Partners & Resources:* DCR Division of Dam Safety, American Rivers, American Whitewater, Friends of the Rivers of Virginia (FORVA), Department of Wildlife Resources, Virginia Aquatic Resources Trust Fund, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership

3. Land Conservation

Land conservation in the Chowan Basin region is essential for protecting its rich biodiversity, water quality, and rural landscapes. A key focus in this area is the restoration and preservation of longleaf pine ecosystems, which once dominated the southeastern U.S. and support a wide range of native wildlife. Proper forest management helps maintain ecological balance, reduce wildfire risk, and enhance carbon sequestration. Conservation strategies include voluntary land easements, habitat restoration, and partnerships with local landowners and conservation groups. By safeguarding these natural resources, the region strengthens its environmental resilience and cultural heritage.

- **Goal 3.1:** Understand existing conditions and actors in the land conservation sphere
 - Compile reports from Conservation Lands dashboard—protected acreage, per capita acreage and value, easement data, [Natural Heritage](#), [The Virginia Wetland Condition Assessment Tool \(WETCAT\)](#), [RIBITS \(Regulatory In-lieu Fee & Bank Info Tracking System\)](#)
 - *Partners & Resources:* [Hampton Roads Planning District Commission \(HRPDC\) Database of Conserved Lands](#), VA Beach Public Schools can conduct tree inventories to track species, diameter, and condition
 - Map priorities to align key focal areas with regional needs
 - *Partners & Resources:* [Tidewater Sentinel Landscape](#), Virginia Dept. of Forestry, TNC data, Long Leaf Cooperators of Virginia
 - Explore funding resources/opportunities for localities and landowners
 - Interface with stakeholders in the land conservation space to build partnerships and collaborate in their efforts
 - *Partners & Resources:* Beechtree Group, Resource Environmental Solutions (RES), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), VA Long Leaf Cooperators Group, Dept. Of Forestry Office of Working Lands (OWL), Timber Resource Companies, Atlantic Conservation Cooperative, CPRG, Restoring America’s Estuaries
- **Goal 3.2:** Explore land/water/wetland/forest carbon credit bank development to support and protect high value conservation lands
 - Interface with [Middle Peninsula Public Access](#) Authority for existing models and evaluate applicability
 - *Partners & Resources:* DOF Office of Working Lands Mitigation Program; [HB206—Small Renewable Energy Project Impact on Natural Resources](#), [TNC Virginia Aquatic Resources Trust Fund](#), Virginia Aquatic Resources Trust Fundn (sunken Meadows)

- **Goal 3.3:** Interface with Tribal communities and leadership to identify and protect significant sites
 - *Partners & Resources:* Nottoway Indian Tribe of Virginia, Cheroenhaka Nottoway, Meherrin Tribe, Chowanoke Tribe, Tribal Coastal Resilience Connections
- **Goal 3.4:** Outreach to local governments and landowners to educate landowners on conservation opportunities and benefits
 - Resource page, available opportunities to connect with, easement types, fee simple ownership
 - *Partners & Resources:* [Generation Next \(VA Forest Landowners Education Program, Virginia Coop. Ext.\)](#), agricultural landowner events (through VSU)—preestablished outreach networks, [Black Family Land Trust/Heirs Property](#), [Tidewater Sentinel Landscape](#) (Virginia Security Corridor and REPI)

4. Water Quality

Water quality in the Chowan Basin region is a critical concern due to its extensive network of rivers, wetlands, and agricultural lands. Protecting and improving water quality involves reducing nutrient runoff, managing stormwater, and restoring natural buffers like wetlands and riparian forests. A key strategy in this effort is the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs), which include measures such as streambank stabilization, livestock exclusion fencing, and improved stormwater controls. These practices help prevent pollutants from entering waterways, support healthy aquatic ecosystems, and ensure safe water for communities and wildlife. Together, these actions contribute to the long-term sustainability of the region's water resources.

- **Goal 4.1:** Increase system redundancy and reduce vulnerability of potable water infrastructure and waterways to natural and man-made disasters
 - Explore the creation of a Source Water Protect Plan, support ongoing efforts of Water Supply Planning by Virginia DEQ
 - Collaborate with the [Virginia Dept. Of Health's Office of Drinking Water](#).
- **Goal 4.2:** Improve water quality through the remediation of identified Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) watersheds across the Chowan Basin region

- Collaborate with VA DEQ, NC DEQ, and locality stakeholders to establish Implementation Plan (IP) Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUCs) in existing TMDL areas
- Develop and administer projects funded by Virginia DEQ’s Non-Point Source 319 Funding
 - *Partners & Resources:* [DEQ Non-Point Source Management](#), Chowan Healthy Waters
- **Goal 4.3:** Advocate for policy/regulatory updates to create additional funding for water quality beyond the Bay
 - Review existing TMDLs and establish new TMDLs across the basin where needed
 - Advocate for stronger water quality regulations, including a basin-wide TMDL
 - Advocate for funding mechanism creation/allocation from the General Assembly for the Albemarle Sound
 - Exploration of an Interstate Compact (beyond existing MOU) between VA and NC so that the efforts are memorialized in a more formal agreement
 - *Partners & Resources:* Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Wetlands Watch, The Natural Conservancy, Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), NC ColLaboratory (model)
- **Goal 4.4:** Explore outreach and implementation of BMPs in urban, rural, agricultural, and timber communities
 - Identify and prioritize locations for BMP implementation across the Chowan Basin
 - Connect landowners with funding resources available for such projects; support efforts to pursue funding
 - *Partners & Resources:* Soil & Water Conservation Districts, [Virginia Conservation Assistance Program \(VCAP\)](#), [Dept. Of Forestry’s Water Quality Program](#), [Riparian Forest for Landowners](#) and [Virginia Trees for Clean Water](#), [BMP Cost-Share for Logging Stream Crossings](#), Virginia Cooperative Extension , USDA/NRCS, Ducks Unlimited, TNC Bottomland Hardwood Forest Protection , Virginia Cooperative Extension

CLOSING REMARKS

The development of this strategic plan marks a meaningful milestone for the Southern Rivers Roundtable. It reflects the result of thoughtful dialogue, shared learning, and a strong commitment from a diverse network of partners who care deeply about the future of the Chowan Basin and Albemarle-Pamlico Watershed. More than a roadmap, this plan embodies our collective values, regional identity, and shared responsibility to the ecosystems and communities that define this landscape.

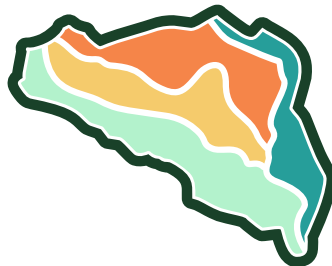
At the heart of our mission is the belief that collaboration is essential. The environmental and social challenges we face are interconnected and complex—no single organization or agency can address them alone. By convening regional stakeholders, we create space for meaningful dialogue, the exchange of ideas, and the alignment of efforts. This plan builds on that foundation, offering a clear and coordinated path forward that leverages the strengths of our coalition.

Through this plan, we reaffirm our commitment to fostering dialogue and coordinated action. Collaboration is not just a strategy—it is the foundation of our success. By working together, we amplify our impact, bridge gaps in resources and knowledge, and build trust across communities and institutions.

Our vision of a resilient regional coalition centers both natural resources and the people who depend on them, and guides every goal and strategy outlined here. Whether we are improving public access, increasing visibility, or advancing on-the-ground projects, we do so with a deep respect for the diverse voices and values that shape this region.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all who contributed to this process. Your insights, time, and dedication have shaped a plan that is both ambitious and grounded. Let this plan serve as a tool for action, a platform for collaboration, and a reaffirmation of our shared commitment to the health and vitality of this region.

Looking ahead, this plan will serve as a living framework; one that evolves with our partnerships, adapts to new challenges, and strengthens our collective ability to protect and enhance the ecosystems and communities of the Chowan Basin and Albemarle-Pamlico Watershed.



ACRONYM GLOSSARY

Acronym	Definition
APNEP	Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership
BMP	Best Management Practice

CFPF	Community Flood Preparedness Fund
CPDC	Crater Planning District Commission
CRS	Community Rating System
HRPDC	Hampton Roads Planning District Commission
HUC	Hydrologic Unit Code
IP	Implementation Plan
LWCF	Land & Water Conservation Fund
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
REPI	Readiness & Protection Integration
RES	Resource Environmental Solutions
RIBITS	Regulatory In-Lieu Fee & Bank Information Tracking System
RTP	Recreational Trails Program
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
VA DCR	Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation
VA DEQ	Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
VA DOF	Virginia Department of Forestry
VA DOF OWL	Virginia Department of Forestry Office of Working Lands
VA DWR	Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
VDOT	Virginia Department of Transportation

VSU	Virginia State University
WETCAT	Wetland Condition Assessment Tool